

What Uncle Sam Is Doing in Porto Rico

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.

WHAT is Uncle Sam doing in Porto Rico? He is doing what he has always done in the case of the white man's burden.

He shouldered it at the close of our war with Spain and he has now been doing it for more than thirteen years. What have we really accomplished in Porto Rico, Hawaii, Guam and the Philippines?

Have the islands been bettered? And what is the present condition of our Little Brown Cousins?

These are some questions I hope to answer in the short series of letters of which this is the beginning. I know something of all these countries. I traveled over Porto Rico at the time we took charge, and I went from there across the Pacific to the Philippines, and studied the islands from Luzon to Mindanao, while they were still under military rule. Later on I visited the Samoans, and later still spent some time in Hawaii. I know what the peoples of these countries were when we took charge of them. I want to show you what they are now. There are men here in Washington who are just back from handling them, and the Bureau of Insular Affairs receives reports every week as to the existing conditions. I have had access to this information, and the most of it comes hot from the tropics.

Porto Rico in 1912. This letter is about Porto Rico. That is a peach of an island! It is 100 miles long, thirty-six miles wide, and its soil is as fat as the garden of Eden. It has a climate like paradise, and the orange, which many believe was the apple that tempted Eve, grows there quite as well.

At the time I was in Porto Rico, however, the condition of the people was nearer that of hell than of heaven. They were miserably poor. There were 800,000 of them, and three-fourths were so lean that the bones of their vertebrae almost showed through their stomachs. It was then a popular saying that one-third of the people starved for fully one-third of the year. I found beggars everywhere, and in San Juan, the capital, Saturday was known as Beggars Day, and at that time the beggars came around in single file to the merchants, each of whom put a lot of coins worth six-tenths of a cent on his desk. The beggars came in one by one and took one coin only, departing blessing the giver.

To-day the beggars have disappeared, and the Governor reports that there is no one without work. The population of 800,000 or a little more has increased to over 1,000,000, and the whole atmosphere is full of prosperity and progress. The cities are growing. San Juan has now 85,000, Ponce 35,000, Mayaguez 16,000 and Caguas, 10,000. Nevertheless the majority of the people still live out in the country, less than one-tenth of them being in cities of 10,000 or over. The density of population is now 225 per square mile, which is an increase of forty-seven since 1890.

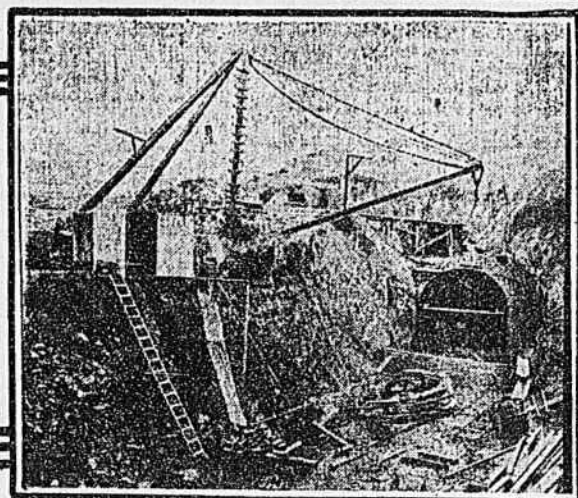
The business is booming. The business of the island is growing faster than that of any other of the West Indies, and faster than most parts of the United States. The Porto Ricans used to buy almost altogether of Europe. They now trade with us, and we have 85 per cent. of their commerce. During the past year the foreign trade increased 15 per cent. or more than \$10,000,000. The Porto Ricans bought from the United States during that year \$14,000,000 worth of American goods, and they sold almost that much of their home produce to us. As it is now there are only six or eight countries of the world to which we sell more than we do to Porto Rico, and these are the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Belgium, Holland and Italy. The Porto Ricans buy from us more than do either Russia, Spain, Austria, China, Japan or Turkey.

Take out the Argentine, and they buy more than all South America. They buy three times as much as the British East Indies, and far more than either Japan or China. Their trade is worth about twice that of Africa and a great deal more than that of the Philippines. Moreover, the business is steadily growing, and it increased more than \$7,000,000 in 1910.

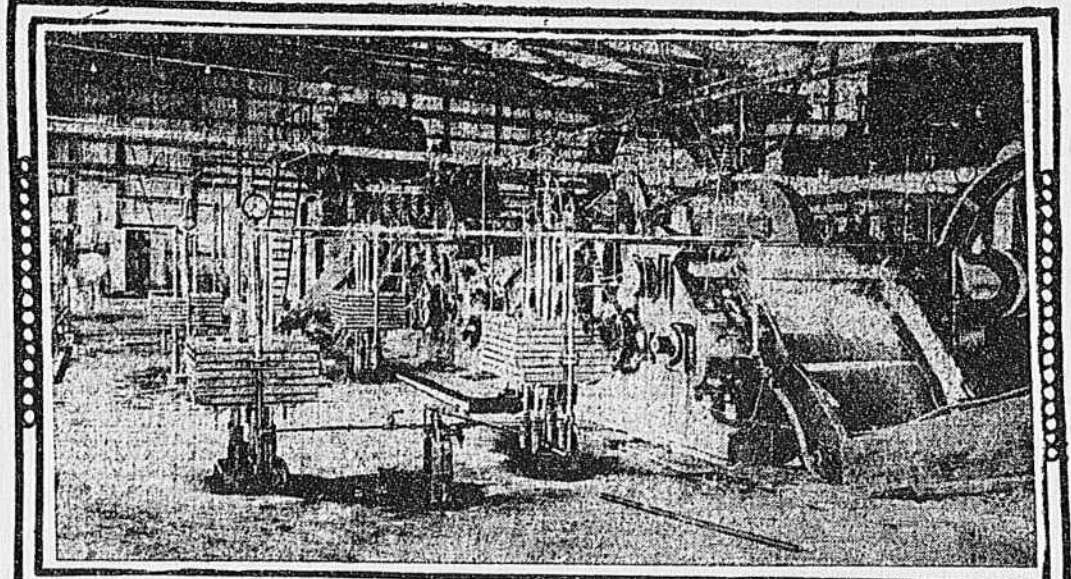
As to the home business of the country, that is exceedingly prosperous. Thirty-two new corporations were organized last year, and the year before



Old-style Porto Rican sugar mills. Scores of abandoned cane mills can be seen.



Reclamation in Porto Rico. This is part of an irrigation project which will redeem 35,000 acres.

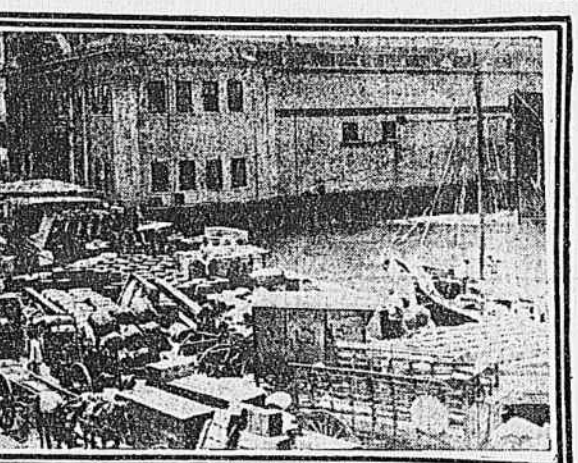


BIG MONEY IN SUGAR. They have introduced modern mills.

that there were more than a hundred home corporations in existence, with an authorized capital of \$22,000,000, while the foreign corporations registered had an authorized capital of \$500,000,000, with a paid-in capital of over \$135,000,000. Last year twenty-two new foreign corporations were organized, and their capital was \$11,000,000.

The wealth of the Porto Ricans. When I was in Porto Rico the people were taxed to death. The assessments were high and everything under the sun had to pay. To-day the taxes have been cut down and the assessments are comparatively low. Nevertheless the value of the property has enormously increased. It is now assessed at \$121,000,000, and this is estimated to be \$75,000,000 below the actual value. The per capita wealth of the island is now about \$200, or \$1,000 per family of five. Take a tropical island where, on the average, if the wealth were divided, every family would receive \$1,000, and you have the conditions as they now are in Porto Rico.

Nevertheless the public debt is exceedingly small. Further on I will show you what the people have been doing in improving their roads, in establishing schools, and in other public works. Notwithstanding all that, the net debt to-day is only a little over \$4,000,000. It is less than 2 per cent. of the actual value of the property, and it represents an indebtedness per head of less than \$1, whereas our average indebtedness per head, the United States over, is \$58. True figures do not lie.



AMERICAN GOODS ON THE WHARVES OF SAN JUAN. The Porto Ricans now trade with us, and we have 85 per cent. of their commerce.

and I am told these figures are true.

They Pay Their Taxes. Moreover, when people are well off they pay their taxes. When they are not doing well they let them run. At the close of this year how much of the taxes of this island do you think were unpaid? Two per cent? Three per cent? Five per cent? No! Not 1 per cent? The treasurer reports that only one-sixteenth of 1 per cent of the taxes are behindhand, and he expects

to cut this out in the next report.

The same healthy condition is shown in the banks. At the time we took hold the most of the banking was done by the Spaniards and the interest rates ran as high as 15 per cent. To-day they are comparatively low, and good loans are made at 7 and 8 per cent. The banks have increased in number and the business is now done by Americans, Porto Ricans, Spaniards and Canadians. There are nine large banks, and they have altogether cash resources of about \$6,000,000, while their deposits amount to close to \$12,000,000. Among the banks are two Canadian institutions which have been established since we took over the island. One is a branch of the Royal Bank of Canada, and another of the Bank of Nova Scotia. The latter was organized in 1910.

Big Money in Sugar. All the big industries of the island are growing. Sugar has always paid better than anything else, and that is the condition to-day. In 1910 the value of the crop was more than \$22,000,000, and it represented about 60 per cent. of all the exports. At that time the island sold enough to give six pounds to every man, woman and child in the United States, with a balance sufficient to furnish a taffy pulling for millions. The sugar plantations form a great necklace running clear around the island. The interior is everywhere mountainous, but there is a belt of low land along the coast, and this is covered with plantations, as the plantations are called. The land here is rich and the climate is perpetual summer. The cane grows for twelve months of the year, and it is larger and sweeter than that of Louisiana.

Since the tariff was taken off, in 1901, these lands have jumped in value. At the time I was in Porto Rico they could be bought for \$39 per acre. They are now worth \$200 an acre, and the most of them pay big dividends on such a valuation.

As to the growth of the industry, the sugar exported in 1901 was worth only \$5,000,000. In 1909 it was worth \$19,000,000, and it has increased steadily from year to year.

The Porto Rican sugar plantations are now as well managed as any of their kind the world over. Many of them are allied to the sugar trust, and all are scientifically operated. They have introduced modern mills, railroads to bring out the cane and men are employed to study diseases and combat insect pests. The actual number of the mills has decreased, and scores of abandoned cane mills can be seen, with their tall chimneys piercing the sky. The cane from the smaller plantations is now carried to the large mills and sold.

Tobacco Grown in Tents. An enormous development has taken place in the tobacco of Porto Rico. It is thirty-four times as great as it was in 1901, and it amounted last year to between five and six million dollars. At the time we took hold of the island the tobacco was cured in open sheds made of poles roofed with thatch. I saw these sheds lining the hills, and in some places they were so steep that the men had to lean as they hung up the leaves. The tobacco was badly cured, and it was so cheap you could buy a good cigar for a cent. The chewing tobacco used by the natives



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was sold by the yard. It was cured with rum, molasses and twisted up in ropes about 100 feet long and as thick as your finger. A half cent's worth of this tobacco would equal the amount contained in the ordinary pocket plug of an American chewer.

Since then tobacco has gone up and science has come in to help raise it. Our Department of Agriculture has introduced the methods of Cuba, and now a great deal is grown under tents of cheesecloth. This is especially so of the tobacco which are used for cigar wrappers. In some of the valleys there are so many tents that at a distance they seem to be filled with snow. The cheesecloth is stretched over poles which uphold a network of wire about ten feet from the ground. The people are using fertilizers and they are taking care as to the selection of seeds. They pay more for their work in the factories, but wages are far lower than with us, and they make cigars and cigarettes at a very high price.

Uncle Sam's Best Fruit Garden. Another thing that is paying well is fruit. This is a new industry for Porto Rico. It amounted to practically nothing at the time we took hold of the island, something like \$100,000 worth of oranges being annually exported. Now the orange exports alone amount to six times that sum, and the total fruit exports are something like \$2,000,000 a year.

We are now taking \$500,000 worth of fresh pineapples from Porto Rico every twelve months, and these are the best sold in our markets. Some of them are as big as peck measures, and they are sweet and full of juice. Pineapples grow all over Porto Rico. One sees great beds of them in the valleys and along the foothills of the mountains. They are not carefully cultivated and grow almost wild. The pineapple exportations have increased \$100,000 during the last year.

The grape fruit business has also increased enormously, and it will compete seriously with that of Florida and Cuba. The freight rates from Porto Rico to New York are said to be lower than from Florida to New York, and the Cuban grapefruit has to pay a duty, while the Porto Rican comes in free. Moreover, the Porto Rican grapefruit is said to be far better than any other, and it stands shipping well.

Money in Cocoanuts and Coffee. A great deal of money is being made in cocoanuts. Thousands of trees are being planted, and these are the ones they bring in on the average a dollar per tree every year. One man makes \$20,000 a year out of his coconut orchard.

This business is easy. The nuts are laid out on the ground and after a short time each sends down a sprout from one of the little eyes at its end. At the same time a root shoots out and goes down into the ground and within a few months the sprout grows to the height of your waist. The root can now be broken off, and the nut planted where the tree is to stand. It is set out so as to give almost 200 trees to the acre, and it begins to bear at five years. The nuts ripen all the year round. They drop off themselves and the men have only to go daily from tree to tree to pick them up. There is a steady market for them, a great quantity being dried for copra.

Another big crop of the future is coffee. This was formerly one of the chief resources of the island, but in 1829 there was a terrible hurricane which uprooted the trees and practically destroyed the plantations. Since then new coffee trees have been set out, and the exports last year were over \$5,000,000 in value, which is about five times what they were in 1901.

The best coffee is raised in the highlands at an elevation of from 1,500 to 2,000 feet above the sea. The climate is so hot that the coffee has to be grown under shade, and it is growing the shade trees that has caused the delay in the reproduction of the plantations.

Another difficulty is the rains, which are so frequent that the coffee is liable to be wet when drying. The rays upon which the beans are laid have to be watched, and taken in whenever it rains. They cannot be left out at night on account of the dew. For this reason it costs more to raise coffee in Porto Rico than in Brazil, but the coffee is far better, and it ought to bring almost double the price of Brazilian coffee.

I understand that the Porto Ricans are about to organize a campaign to introduce this coffee into the United States. They have already established

offices in New York, and will probably have exhibition rooms in our different cities.

Reclamation in Porto Rico.

What is doing more for Porto Rico than anything else is the wonderful system of new roads, which has been built so that nearly every part of the country has easy access to the sea. Of this I will write another letter.

Another big public work which has to do with the agricultural wealth of the island is the reclaiming of some thing like 35,000 acres of land. This scheme relates to the southeastern end of Porto Rico, where the soil is exceedingly rich, but where, owing to the high mountains at the north, there is a scant rainfall. The moist winds strike the cold mountains and the rain drops on the northern slopes.

The average rainfall is only forty-two inches, ranging from twenty to sixty inches per year. The land is excellent sugar land and will be worth, if it has plenty of water, about \$200 per acre. As it is now, some of it is planted to sugar. This crop requires abundant moisture, and when the rain falls it is scanty it fails and millions of dollars are lost.

In order to irrigate this section the

insular government has issued bonds to the amount of \$3,000,000 and they will probably need \$1,000,000 more before the work is completed. The first \$2,000,000 worth of bonds have been sold, and a large part of the money has gone into the work. The project is now under the charge of Chief Engineer Beardsley, the man who did so much for irrigation in the Philippines. Among the dams he is constructing is one on the Patillas River, which is 132 feet high and 1,000 feet long. Another is the Carite dam, which is 105 feet high, and a third, the Guayabal dam, which will be 112 feet high and over 2,000 feet long. There are also several great reservoirs and tunnels, and altogether irrigation works which will compare favorably with some in our arid lands of the West. Engineer Beardsley finds that his men cannot do as much work as those he has employed in the United States, and he attributes their lack of strength to lack of good food. He is now giving the men three meals a day free of charge, believing that he will be repaid in the additional work done.

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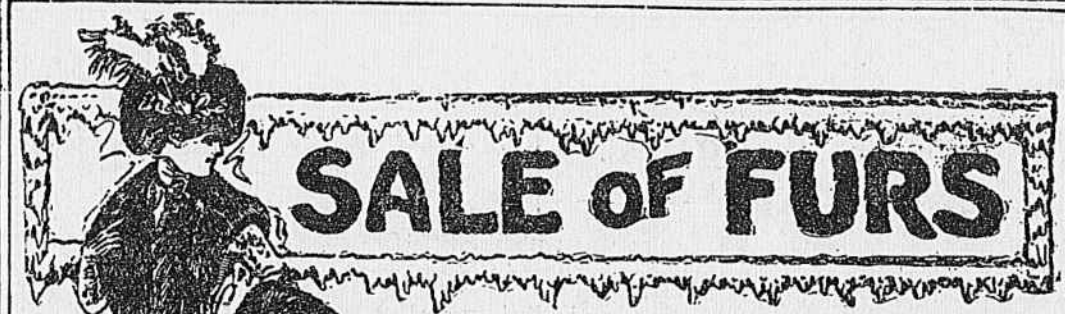
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